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ABSTRACT

The need for British businesses to be able to communicate with their customers in their own languages is discussed in this analysis of British preparation for doing business in the European Community (EC). The EC now accounts for half of all exports from the United Kingdom (UK). This paper summarizes five major types of resources available to assist British businesses in upgrading the language skills of their employees. They include the following: (1) the LINGUA programme, which is an EC-sponsored program that includes grants for inservice teacher training and other purposes; (2) the Language-Export Centres, a network of 17 sites in the UK that bridges the language-business gap; (3) the Training Access Points Project, which is designed to improve access to information on work-related education and training opportunities throughout the UK via a computerized database; (4) the offerings of local universities, polytechnics, and colleges of further education; and (5) advice and referral services, such as the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research and the Institute of Linguists. Names, addresses, and telephone numbers for these resources are appended. Contains 8 references. (LB)

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British Efforts to Upgrade Business Foreign Language Skills: Preparing for Participation in the Single Market of the European Community

British businesses, both large and small, are beginning to comprehend the importance of developing business foreign language skills, in part because of prompting from the Department of Trade and Industry. With the European Community (EC) progressively establishing a single market during the period ending December 31, 1992, British businesses are realizing that they will have access to new and expanding business opportunities. Their potential market within the EC will include approximately 323 million people, a single market almost the size of the markets of the United States of America and Japan combined (The Single Market: The Facts, 1989).

The largest export market of the United Kingdom (U.K.) is the EC. It is a growing market, one that now accounts for half of all U.K. exports, which were valued at £41 billion (about $80 billion) in 1988 (The Single Market: The Facts, 1989). To tap this major market effectively, however, British businesses must be able to communicate with their customers in their own languages. Since there is clear evidence of a direct link between export performance and foreign language proficiency (The Single Market: The Facts, 1989), progressive

British businesses are viewing foreign language training as a necessary investment that will contribute toward their success in the single market.

Influencing attitudes toward business foreign language training in the U.K. is the widely distributed publication of the Department of Trade and Industry titled The Single Market: An Action Checklist for Business (1989), which includes a checklist focusing attention on training, languages, and recruitment for the single market. Among other things, that checklist probes the new and improved language–related skills that are needed to meet the challenge of the single market, how these new skills might be acquired, how the needed staff training can be provided, and how the training programme can be planned and managed.

When U.K. businesses commit themselves to the development of the business foreign language skills of their employees, to whom can they turn for assistance? What types of resources are available to assist them in developing crucial business foreign language–related skills, especially if they are small– or middle–sized businesses?

Five major types of resources are available to assist British businesses that desire to upgrade the business foreign language skills of their employees. These include the LINGUA programme; the Language–Export Centres; the Training Access

Points Project; the offerings of local universities, polytechnics, and colleges of further education; and the advice and referral services. Each of these types of resources is discussed in one of the following sections of this article. Names, addresses, and telephone numbers for these resources appear in the accompanying appendix.

The LINGUA Programme

The LINGUA programme, an EC–sponsored programme, operates under the jurisdiction of the International Relations Division of the Department of Education and Science in the U.K. The aim of the LINGUA programme is to promote through initial and continuing vocational training the quantitative and qualitative improvement in foreign language competence in order to develop communication skills within the EC workforce. The LINGUA programme defines foreign languages as the nine working languages of the EC—Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish—plus Irish and Luxembourgish ("The European Community," 1989).

The LINGUA programme, which is funded from the EC budget, includes five major components: (1) support for in–service training; (2) promotion of learning of foreign languages in universities and the exchange of foreign language students; (3) support for the development of

language training in business; (4) support for the development of educational exchanges for young people in professional, vocational, and technical education; and (5) establishment of a network of communication and technical support for LINGUA at the EC level ("The European Community," 1989).

The LINGUA programme provides grants for the expansion and improvement of in–service training for both foreign language teachers and foreign language teacher trainers. A major part of the in–service training is blocks of time that the teachers spend in a member–state where the language they teach is spoken ("The European Community," 1989).

The LINGUA programme promotes the learning of foreign languages in universities as well as the exchange of foreign language students. Inter–university cooperation programmes that enable students to spend part of their course time in the country whose language they are studying are supported by grants. In addition, grants are available to individual students participating in the inter–university cooperation programmes ("The European Community," 1989).

LINGUA programme grants also support the development of language training in business. Grants fund work for diagnosis of the need for foreign languages in

Does everyone know what this is?

businesses, especially small– and medium–sized companies; for development of teaching and open learning materials; for a system of exchanges among representatives of small– and medium–sized businesses; and for work on the development of vocational language qualifications carried out in two or more member–states ("The European Community," 1989).

LINGUA funding provides for the development of educational exchanges for young people in professional, vocational, and technical education. Grants support the development and implementation of these exchanges, which must be at least 14 days in length and organized as a part of their course ("The European Community," 1989).

Some LINGUA funding is earmarked for the establishment of a network of communication and technical support at the EC level. How the network will be structured has not yet been determined since 1990 was the preparatory year for the entire LINGUA programme and since major expenditures for the LINGUA programme are not being made until 1991 ("The European Community," 1989).

The Language–Export Centres

A network of 17 Language–Export Centres, supported by the Department of Education and Science's PICKUP initiative and the Training Agency, exists in all sections of the U.K. to bridge the language–business gap that is commonplace. From

their offices in Bath, Birmingham, Brighton, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Loughborough, Manchester, Newcastle–upon–Tyne, Norwich, Oxford, Portsmouth, Preston, Salford, Stoke–on–Trent, and Swansea, the Language–Export Centres assist local businesses in strengthening their export potential through a blend of export consultancy and language training tailored to their specific needs (The Single Market: The Facts, 1989). Typical services provided by Language–Export Centres include the following: (1) foreign language training; (2) country and business etiquette briefings; (3) export skills training; and (4) translation and interpreting ("Foreign Language Training," n. d.).

After staff from Language–Export Centres have audited the foreign language training needs of businesses, they offer tailor–made foreign language training in a full range of languages. Often the actual instruction is provided by faculty members of area universities, polytechnics, and colleges of further education using facilities at their own institutions or at the businesses. Language–Export Centres can also assist with the recruitment of foreign language speakers ("Foreign Language Training," n. d.).

Language–Export Centres offer country and business etiquette briefings as well. These workshops and seminars develop awareness and provide specific cultural and trade

information that is crucial to operating a business successfully in a foreign environment ("Foreign Language Training," n. d.).

Another function of Language–Export Centres is to provide various types of export skills training after advising businesses on the development of training strategies. Typical export skills training addresses such topics as export documentation, finance, channels of distribution, international marketing, and international law. Wherever possible, the skills training focuses on the topics from the perspective of the foreign country in which the U.K. business wishes to sell its goods and services. Advice on advertising in non–English speaking markets is also available ("Foreign Language Training," n. d.).

Language–Export Centres offer U.K. businesses translation and interpreting services for a wide variety of languages. Technical and commercial translations are one service of Language–Export Centres. Language–Export Centres can also arrange for technical and business interpreters whether they are needed in the U.K. or abroad. Editing and proofreading services for foreign language texts are available from Language–Export Centres throughout the U.K. ("Foreign Language Training," n. d.).

The Training Access Points Project

The Training Access Points Project, funded by the Employment Department—Training Agency, is designed to improve access to information on work–related education and training opportunities throughout the U.K. via a computerized database. Wide–ranging information about available education and training at the local and national levels is provided for individuals and businesses considering full–time or part–time, formal or informal learning options at home, work, or elsewhere. Quick access to the database information is available at information points in job centres, libraries, and other high street locations in some 30 areas of the U.K. and through mobile Training Access Points that can visit the sites of employers. Public terminals allow individuals and employers to search through records about locally available learning opportunities and to print details of the relevant records using special software designed for non–computer–literate operators. Information about graduate and postgraduate courses and non–advanced and advanced further education opportunities on the ECCTIS database, short work–related courses on the PICKUP database, and flexible learning opportunities on the MARIS–NET database are accessible by dialing into British Telecom's PRESTEL network or by using a compact disk system. Thus, both individuals

who can visit?

and employers can use Training Access Points to put together an appropriate learning programme that includes the development of business foreign language skills (TAP, 1989).

The Offerings of Local Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Further Education

Local universities, polytechnics, and colleges of further education offer a wide variety of programmes that develop business foreign language skills. To suggest the nature of some of the offerings that are available, programmes of three institutions are briefly described. Some of these programmes are under the jurisdiction of a modern languages department; others are under the jurisdiction of a business school.

The Department of Modern Languages at Bristol Polytechnic offers several innovative programmes that merge foreign language skills with business subject matter. The three–year bachelor of arts honours degree in modern languages and information systems is designed to develop practical foreign language skills to a high level of competence and to combine them with the study of related fields affected by technological change in business and commerce, especially computer–based information systems. A strong integration of information systems with foreign language study occurs by means of case studies in an international context, exploration

of information technology in language courses, and projects undertaken during the 21–week work placement abroad. A one–year full–time course for language graduates or diplomates who wish to use their language skills in a career in industry or business is designed to yield a postgraduate diploma in foreign languages for business. This course combines practical applications of language, secretarial, and administrative skills with an advanced course in one or two European languages. Upon successful completion of the course, students are fully qualified as bilingual administrators, secretaries, or personal assistants at home and abroad (Bristol Polytechnic Prospectus, 1989).

Middlesex Polytechnic offers several courses that combine foreign language skills with various majors, including one in business through the Middlesex Business School. The four–year bachelor of arts honours degree in European business administration is designed to meet the growing demand for bilingual businesspersons who can function effectively in the international business environment. The course is a joint enterprise of Middlesex Polytechnic at London in the U.K., the Fachhockschule für Technik und Wirtschaft at Reutlingen in Germany, the Ecole Supérieure de Commerces at Reims in France, and the Universidad Pontificia Comillas at Madrid in Spain. During the first two years of

instruction, students receive intensive—and if necessary remedial—foreign language instruction plus business and administrative knowledge within a broad and integrated European context. The second year includes a six-month industrial placement. At the beginning of the third year, students transfer to another country, where all activities are conducted in the local language. The third year of the course includes more business and administrative content and a second six-month industrial placement in the country in which they are studying. The fourth year of the course includes study of two specialization subjects and a project or industrial study. Successful completion of the course yields both British and French, German, or Spanish qualifications depending on the foreign language studied (Courses and Careers in Europe, 1988).

The Manchester Business School at the University of Manchester has developed a Language Centre in response to demands from the business, commercial, and financial worlds. The teaching of languages for business purposes is the only reason for the existence of the centre. Courses are offered either on the premises of the Manchester Business School or of a company by staff who have appropriate language qualifications and business experience. Business foreign language courses in Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, French, German,

Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Serbo–Croat, and Spanish are regularly available; courses in other languages are available on request. These courses are provided for MBA candidates within the Manchester Business School and for practicing business managers. A wide range of special teaching and consulting services is available through the Language Centre, including tailor–made instruction for individuals and companies, language learning workshops, language consultancy services, language audits, language aptitude training, and distance learning packs in French, German, and Italian. Instruction that develops the English business language skills of foreign managers and business students is also available in a variety of configurations (Directory of Programmes, 1990).

The Advice and Referral Services

A variety of advice and referral services is available to assist U.K. businesses that desire to upgrade their business foreign language skills. In many cases the assistance is provided free of charge to businesses.

The Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research provides useful information about the language–acquisition process. The Institute of Linguists offers advice about language training and provides a tailor–made assessment service to businesses desiring to test the language

competence of their employees; in addition, it makes available to businesses the names and addresses of translators and interpreters. The Institute of Translation and Interpreting provides advice about interpreting needs and the use of staff or freelance interpreters; it, too, provides the names and addresses of translators and interpreters to interested businesses. The Association of Translation Companies sponsors the Language Line, which matches the requirements of a business with a qualified translation company via the telephone; it also provides a membership directory to businesses that request it. Technical Help to Exporters can provide businesses with assistance on technical translations. The British Institute of Management has HELPLINE, a computer–based information and retrieval service that provides access to a wide variety of business–related data, including information about business foreign language training. Local chambers of commerce may also recommend suitable language–related courses to businesses. Trade associations may be able to make recommendations that are applicable to their fields (The Single Market: The Facts, 1989.

In summary, a variety of approaches are being used in the U.K. to upgrade business foreign language skills. Since the LINGUA programme; the Language-Export Centres; the Training Access Points Project; the offerings of local

universities, polytechnics, and colleges of further education; and the advice and referral services have been in operation for a relatively short period of time, it is impossible to assess their success now. Perhaps in five to ten years, it will be possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the mix of British efforts to upgrade business foreign language skills.

Appendix

Sources of Assistance—Names, Addresses, and Telephone Numbers

LINGUA Programme
International Relations Division
Department of Education and Science
Grove House
2–6 Orange Street
London WC2H 7WE
United Kingdom
(071) 321–0433

Language–Export Centres
Adult Training Promotions Unit
Room 2/2
Department of Education and Science
Elizabeth House
York Road
London SE1 7PH
United Kingdom
(071) 934–0888

Training Access Points
TAP Unit
Employment Department:
The Training Agency
St. Mary's House
Moorfoot
Sheffield S1 4PG
United Kingdom
(0742) 597347

Department of Modern Languages
Bristol Polytechnic
Coldharbour Lane
Frenchay
Bristol BS16 1QY
United Kingdom
(0272) 656261,
Ext. 2393

Middlesex Business School (081) 202–1539
Middlesex Polytechnic
The Burroughs
London NW4 4BT
United Kingdom

Manchester Business School (061) 275–6333
Booth Street West
Manchester M15 6PB
United Kingdom

Centre for Information on (071) 486–8221
Language Teaching and Research
Regent's College
Inner Circle
Regent's Park
London NW1 4NS
United Kingdom

Institute of Linguists (071) 359–7445
24a Highbury Grove
London N5 2EA
United Kingdom

Institute of Translation (071) 794–9931
and Interpreting
318a Finchely Road
London NW3 5HT
United Kingdom

Language Line (071) 630–5454
Association of Translation Companies
7 Buckingham Gate
London SW1E 6JS
United Kingdom

Technical Help to Exporters (0908) 220022
BS1
Linford Wood
Milton Keynes
Bucks MK14 6LE
United Kingdom

HELPLINE (0536) 204222
British Institute of Management
Management House
Cottingham Road
Corby
Northants NN17 1TT
United Kingdom

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Bristol Polytechnic Prospectus. (1989). (Available from Bristol Polytechnic, Coldharbour Lane, Frenchay, Bristol BS16 1QY, United Kingdom).

Courses and Careers in Europe. (1988). (Available from Middlesex Business School, Middlesex Polytechnic, The Burroughs, London NW4 4BT, United Kingdom).

Directory of Programmes. (1990). (Available from Manchester Business School, Booth Street West, Manchester M15 6PB, United Kingdom).

"The European Community Lingua Programme." (1989). (Available from International Relations Division, Department of Education and Science, Grove House, 2–6 Orange Street, London WC2H 7WE, United Kingdom).

"Foreign Language Training and Export Skills for International Business." (N. d.). (Available from Language Consultants for Industry, South West Language–Export Centre, 14 Queen Square, Bath BA1 2HN, United Kingdom).

The single market: An action checklist for business (4th ed.). (1989). London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

The single market: The facts (4th ed.). (1989). London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

TAP: Training access points. (1989). (Available from TAP Unit, Employment Department: The Training Agency, St. Mary's House, Moorfoot, Sheffield S1 4PQ, United Kingdom).